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Southern Tier Library System Learning on the Go Grant
EDU2011 Application
Docket No. 10-222

FCC Mail Room

February 24, 2012 Interim Report

Our pilot program began October 18, 2011 and enabled the Southern Tier Library System to include handheld mobile Internet devices such as tablets and smart phones as training platforms for our mobile JobLink "Free help applying for jobs!" project which provides online job searching, resume writing, job application skills, and digital literacy to unemployed and under employed individuals in our 3,500 square mile rural service area. In addition to helping residents develop computer skills for work and for finding and applying for jobs, another JobLink goal is to expose residents to the benefits of broadband and to encourage more people to come online.

There is very little broadband competition in this region; most communities have only one provider. The primary provider is Time Warner cable with a few small communities served by local wireless and DSL providers. The majority of our 48 public library members rely on the E-rate program to achieve current on-premises broadband service via cable at 5Mbps x 768Kbps. Due to Gates Foundation grants plus the eRate program three libraries are able to afford 15Mbps x 2Mbps plus the 5Mbps x 768Kbps. As a result of the 73% USAC-approved discount STLS receives from the E-rate program our libraries are able to offer patrons such online services such as real time electronic check-out of library materials; search, request and renewal of materials online; search and downloading of digital audio books and eBooks; wireless in-library connections and access to online services such as commercial service *JobNow* which provides job search assistance and live help from tutors with resumes, cover letters, interviews, writing, and career assessments.

Most Southern Tier communities have many more residents living in poverty than the state average of 11.9%. Cable Internet access is too expensive for many because it can only be purchased bundled with a cable television subscription. Libraries report numerous library users who rely on the library because they can no longer afford to pay for Internet access at home. Public libraries in the Southern Tier region provide 363 public access computers to the 283,000 residents of our five-county area.

Off-Premises Project Benefit

The existing STLS mobile wireless program works seamlessly with resources provided under the Learning on the Go Grant. Our existing program equipment included a Verizon MiFi 3G/4G device which provides Internet access to 4 external devices such as laptops, and tablets as well as a Cradlepoint router with Verizon USB 3G/4G modem providing Internet access for up to 15 external devices. Secure, powerful, and configurable, the Cradlepoint router is able to create instant networks anywhere there is a mobile broadband data signal. We allocated funds from the STLS budget for purchase of four different smart phones and two additional iPads.

We used the e-Rate discount to fund connections for the four smartphones with direct 3G Internet access, and six iPads with 3G Internet access.

The smart phones and iPads allow JobLink staff to offer classes in digital literacy and job seeking:

- **Test Drive an iPad:** Learn how an iPad works – apps, music, e-mail, and internet! Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and get hands-on with an iPad. Class is targeted for new users.
- **iPads and your e-Library:** Learn what on-line library resources are available using an iPad! This hands-on workshop is to show those that are familiar with iPads how to access library app resources.
- **Smartphone vs. Smartphone:** Comparison of 4 Smartphones – an iPhone 4, a Droid ThunderBolt, a Windows Trophy, and a Blackberry Bold. Learn how to download and use an app, exactly what an app is, how to use the internet, listen to music, and take pictures, etc. This class is good for those thinking of buying a Smartphone or those that have one but are not sure how to use it!
- **Find a Job...Using Your Smartphone!** Learn how to use your Smartphone to search and apply for jobs! Popular apps and best practices will be shared.
- **Downloading eBooks:** Learn how to download FREE eBooks through your local library. Participants in this class will be shown step-by-step instructions on how to download and transfer eBooks to an ereader.

Even if a library's wireless connection is down, classes can be provided using the Smartphones (as a wireless hotspot) or through the MiFi as well as at community agencies that don't have wireless or insufficient capacity. Made available through the FCC Learning on the Go grant, this equipment is enabling libraries to work with community partners to bring training to people where they are.

Project Cost

The Learning on the Go program adds 10 E-rate eligible mobile learning devices to the existing mobile JobLink project.

\$1,323 Total project eligible telecommunications cost for 3 ½ month interim period.

4 smart phones @\$54.06/month \$214/month

6 iPads @\$27.26/month \$164/month

\$6,160 Total non-eligible project costs during interim period

\$ 500 purchase of 4 smart phones

\$1,450 purchase of 2 iPads

\$2,811 trainer's hours – preparation, travel and class time

\$1,399 average mileage costs

Effectiveness of Protection Measures

Each iPad has a filtering app installed, however because these classes are for adults and devices used only in class, filtering is not an issue. The Smart phones do not have filtering. The filtering on the iPads and lack of filtering on the Smartphones have not affected classes

Lessons Learned

- At this time, providing free high speed internet and computer training, both on and off-premises, are crucial to the communities in our region. More and more government forms and applications are being moved to on-line only, not to mention pretty much all job applications. Additionally the more computer-savvy an individual is, the higher their "worth" as an employee will be.
- Although almost everyone has a cell phone, hardly any of the people in our area have a Smartphone or any desire to get one. Many do not even have adequate cell phone coverage where they live and only use their cell phone occasionally (mainly when they travel). Residents are being asked to go from basic to advanced skills without anything in between. These same groups barely have basic computer skills (for a variety of reasons including seniors with limited exposure, computer not needed for work, lack of understanding how computers and broadband can be beneficial) much less skills to learn how to operate a super mini-computer, which is basically what a Smartphone is. Because many people in our area have never had to learn how to use a computer or cannot afford Internet access it is vital that on-premises E-rate supported Internet access is available to them as well as the training provided through JobLink. We see that providing such training and access for our community is critical and we would not be able to achieve the scale of this project without the E-rate discounts STLS receives.
- At the same time residents who own computers and have Internet access are the most enthusiastic participants in Learning on the Go classes.
90% (186) of students in the Learning-on-the-Go classes own a computer of some kind
78% (161) of these students have Internet access
Why would people who already have a computer and Internet access come to classes?
Since the Learning on the Go classes are based on newer devices, reasons include receipt of a device as a gift, intimidated to learn on their own, curiosity about new devices. Many people who didn't grow up with computer gadgets are afraid of "breaking" the machine. In addition devices are increasingly designed to be operated "intuitively" with few or no printed instructions provided.

Outcomes

Learning outcomes reflect what we learned about student computer skills. The instructors continually adjust their presentations to meet the needs of individual classes.

- 98% (90) of participants in the “Test Drive an iPad” class said that as a result of their training they were able to do one or more of the following: “Download, open and use applications,” “use iPad features,” or “Search for programs.”
- 67% (16) of participants in the “iPads and your eLibrary” class said that as a result of their training they were able to do one or more of the following: “Download the apps,” “Use the BookMyne App to search for books and/or place a hold,” or “Use the OverDrive App to search for and download eBooks/audiobooks.”
- 85% (51) of participants in the “Downloading eBooks” class said that as a result of their training they were able to do one or more of the following: “Browse for eBooks,” “Place a hold,” or “Download an eBook.”
- 100% (14) of participants in the “Smartphone vs Smartphone” class said that as a result of their training they were able to do one or more of the following: “Understand what a smart phone is,” or “know what features are available.”

Success stories

- On February 15th at the Corning Salvation Army, parents learned how to use a new school district student learning website, and teachers learned how iPads can be used to support special needs students. In cooperation with the Salvation Army, the public library in Corning organized the event and asked STLS JobLink staff to bring a wireless router and iPads and provide additional training support. A teacher who attended the event was thrilled to learn how an iPad can be configured for students and used to find teacher-friendly apps. She immediately talked to the public library staff to schedule a training event for school occupational and speech therapists at a nearby elementary school. Because this school does not have wireless access, having a router will be crucial to the event’s success. In support of the library staff in Corning, JobLink staff will bring the Cradlepoint, additional iPads and assist with the training.
- The Southern Tier Library System Annual Meeting was held in a building with inadequate Internet access, so presentations were powered by the MiFi and modem Internet connections. Without them, there would have been no Internet available for the speakers or the Skype call at the end of the evening and no demonstration of the possibilities of broadband.
- A resident had 20 years of experience in data entry at an insurance firm using the company’s proprietary software. In spite of her computer experience she did not know how to use Microsoft software. This resident developed many new computer skills by attending every JobLink class we offer, including learning how to attach resumes to e-mails. She enthusiastically reported “I learned about the paper clip during class. I love the paper clip!”